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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**MARINE ADVISOR ADVANTAGE:
INSTITUTIONALIZING SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Marine Advisor Advantage: Institutionalizing Security Force Assistance

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Thesis: The strategic imperative of institutionalizing Security Force Assistance (SFA) capabilities will require the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) to further professionalize SFA efforts across planning, training, education, and execution. To best meet this requirement the service should establish a Marine Advisor Unit (MAU) at each Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) that provides regional combatant commanders with a scalable cadre of screened, trained, and regionally-oriented Marine advisors.

Discussion: The U.S. National Security Strategy identifies strengthening the U.S. military capacity to train and assist foreign security forces (FSF) as a key element of the U.S. strategy. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review further identifies “institutionalizing” the capabilities of general purpose forces (GPF) to conduct SFA as a key initiative for each of the military services. While this strategic reprioritization toward SFA capabilities presents challenges, it also presents some very unique competitive advantages for the USMC. These competitive advantages will become increasingly important as the Department of Defense (DoD) evaluates service efficiencies as part of anticipated budget cuts.

The legacy of USMC battlefield victories, warrior ethos, and small wars history including training and advising indigenous forces has built “brand name” recognition around the world that generates inherent demand for Marine advisors in the contended littorals. This “brand” recognition coupled with the service’s focus on small-unit leadership and austere habits, uniquely positions the USMC to refocus and “rebrand” their portfolio of core capabilities and become the DoD’s provider of choice for SFA. This increased focus on generating regionally-oriented advisor expertise also serves as potent combat multiplier for the service’s core mission as the nation’s expeditionary crisis response force.

While the USMC has experimented with SFA “enabling” organizations and ad hoc advisor teams, the service has not yet developed a force structure solution that provides for the stabilized development of a scalable cadre of Marine advisor expertise. Establishing dedicated advisor units will stabilize and enable the development of regional advisor expertise, professionalize SFA efforts, and provide continuity for regional FSF relationships.

This type of rebalancing of service priorities is not new to the USMC. Throughout its history evolutionary change has been essential to the survival of the service. How the USMC balances its current capabilities with future relevance is even more critical today.

Conclusion: The “brand name” recognition, focus on small-unit tactics, and low-cost habits, of the USMC uniquely position the service with a competitive advantage to meet the growing demand for SFA expertise. To fully leverage the USMC advantage in advising FSFs will require institutionalizing the long-term capacity to train, educate, equip, and professionalize a dedicated cadre of regionally-oriented Marine advisors formed in dedicated advisor units at each MEF.

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Preface

To remain the Nation's force in readiness, the Marine Corps must continuously innovate. This requires that we look across the entire institution and identify areas that need improvement and effect positive change.

Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025

My objective in writing this paper is to leverage recent experience and contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve USMC Security Force Assistance (SFA) capabilities associated with building the capacity of partner nation security forces. I have spent the last five years immersed in this topic, starting with my selection to serve as a Marine advisor in Iraq. Following my advisor tour, I had the unique opportunity to serve as a plank-holder in the formation of the Marine Corps Training and Advisory Group (MCTAG) which later merged with the Security Cooperation Education and Training Center (SCETC) and was renamed the Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group (MCSCG). In order to provide better context on my experience-bias, the following is an overview of my SFA-related experience.

The initial experience that generated my passion in foreign military advising was my selection to serve as an intelligence advisor to the Iraqi Army from June 2008 to September 2009. Prior to deploying, I attended training at the Advisor Training Group, Camp Del Mar, California and the follow-on "combat advisor" field training at the Advisor Training Group, 29 Palms, California. Upon completion of the training, I deployed for one year as part of a 15-man military transition team (MiTT) assigned to live with, train, advise, and assist the 7th Iraqi Army Infantry Division who had responsibility for the Western Al Anbar Province of Iraq. I served as a principal advisor to the Division Chief of Staff, G-2, and Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) Battalion Commander. My efforts were focused on advising and assisting the Iraqi Army leadership in the fight against subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency. My time

as an advisor in Iraq included the transition to post-Security Agreement sovereignty and national elections.

After serving two previous combat tours in Iraq, my third tour as an advisor opened my eyes to the impact that a small team of Marine advisors could have in building partner capacity and strategically important relationships. As a result, I developed a personal interest in exploring strategies to improve the professionalization and capacity of USMC advising capabilities. I had learned through a mentor that the USMC was in the early phases of forming an experimental new command, the Marine Corps Training and Advisory Group (MCTAG), focused on developing an institutionalized advisor capacity for the service. Upon my return from Iraq, I received orders to MCTAG and was privileged to serve as a primary staff officer during the stand-up of the new command (July 2009 to June 2012). The command was officially activated on January 1, 2010 and the first board slated Colonel (O-6) Commanding Officer took command June 2012.

When I checked into MCTAG, it had the feel of a start-up company. At that time the unit had a small cadre of forty-four Marines led by Colonel Scott Cottrell, also a former advisor to the Iraqi Army. Most of the Marines at MCTAG had fought for the opportunity to be there and were passionate about improving Marine advisor training, sourcing, planning, and institutional recognition based on their shared experiences as members of advisor teams in Iraq.

In the weeks prior to my arrival at MCTAG, the President of the Republic of Georgia publicly announced an offer to send four Georgian infantry battalions to Afghanistan in support of the NATO mission. The Georgians specifically requested to train and fight alongside U.S. Marines. The mission to train and equip the Georgians was tasked to European Command and Marine Forces Europe. Ultimately, the newly developing MCTAG was tasked with developing and managing a comprehensive training program to prepare four 750-man Georgian battalions

for full-spectrum, distributed counterinsurgency operations. While a significant task for a nascent command, the Republic of Georgia mission was a model example and a proof of concept for exactly the type of SFA capacity that MCTAG was being built to provide. The effort exemplified SFA capabilities building from interagency coordination and assessment to the manning, training, equipping, and deploying of a strategically important ally. The program, titled Georgian Deployment Program – International Security Assistance Force (GDP-ISAF), also demonstrated how building the capacity of an FSF could immediately provide forces for coalition operations, Afghanistan in this case.

While at MCTAG, I had the opportunity to serve as an early GDP-ISAF planner and coordinator working with Marine Forces Command, Marine Forces Europe, USMC Training and Education Command, and the Marine Expeditionary Forces on all aspects of the program. My early responsibilities included curriculum development and coordination of sourcing, training, and deploying of hundreds of individual augment Marine advisors to the Republic of Georgia. I also had the opportunity to deploy to the GDP-ISAF training camp located at the Krtsanisi Training Area (KTA), Republic of Georgia from September 2010 to March 2011. I was privileged to serve as the Georgia Training Team (GTT) Deputy Team Chief/Operations Officer with responsibility for planning, coordinating, and executing a six-month Battalion level training plan preparing the 33d Georgian Infantry Battalion for full-spectrum combat operations in Afghanistan. As the GTT Operations Officer, I led (143) USMC advisors in the development and execution of (26) training packages building from individual skills to staff integration, counterinsurgency fundamentals, and Battalion-level combined arms live fire events. In addition to managing the daily training of the 33d Battalion, I also served as an advisor to the cadre of Georgian instructors assigned to the camp. The GDP-ISAF mission was designed to not only

train Georgian infantry battalions but to also develop the institutional capacity of Georgian military instructors to assume increasing responsibility for future training programs.

During my time at MCTAG, I also had the opportunity to participate in other SFA missions including leading a 5-man advisor team to train Bahraini Marines and deploying to Nairobi, Kenya as the intelligence advisor in support of a 30-day staff training course for (36) African officers assigned to the Mogadishu Headquarters of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

My experience over the past five years has provided a unique vantage point from which I have observed the recent evolution of SFA mission priority in the USMC. I believe that as we look to the future, SFA will emerge as an increasingly important core competency for the USMC. Generating regionally-oriented Marine advisor expertise is as potent combat multiplier that builds critical capabilities that complement and facilitate the USMC core mission of global expeditionary crisis response. Building FSF capacity not only helps partner nations provide for their own security but it also builds the trust and interoperability that matters most when Marines are called to respond to crisis. Our service must embrace the SFA mission and look for opportunities to institutionalize and professionalize the unique skills required for the development of effective Marine advisors.

INTRODUCTION

Building partnership capacity elsewhere in the world also remains important for sharing the costs and responsibilities of global leadership. Whenever possible, we will develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives, relying on exercises, rotational presence, and advisory capabilities.

National Defense Strategy, 2012

As the U.S. military concludes a decade of war and faces the realities of a rapidly evolving international security environment coupled with a period of fiscal austerity, the role of the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) is at a strategic “inflection point.”¹ In nearly all national security policy guidance the narrative is the same. The defense budgets will continue to decline and the future security environment will increasingly be characterized by instability, poverty, extremism, intractable ethnic and religious issues, failed states, and asymmetric conflict carried out by non-state actors. While the threat of large-scale conventional war should never be overlooked, the future security environment demands that the U.S. military increasingly shift priorities to the employment of “indirect approaches” focused on building the capacity of partner nation security forces and preventing festering problems from growing into crises.² As the former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates states, the realities of the asymmetric threat environment dictate that “the most important military component...is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our partners to defend and govern their own countries.”³ Through engagement and partnering the U.S. is able to proactively shape the security environment rather than just respond to it when crisis erupts.

As national leaders struggle to understand how the high-technology, industrial military force will be transitioned to deal with the realities of the future security environment, the USMC stands at a crossroads of unprecedented opportunity. Throughout history, periods of uncertainty, rapid change, and fiscal austerity have been opportunities for USMC thought leaders to adapt, transform, and innovate. Since the USMC was founded by the Continental Congress of 1775,

the service has built a legacy of improvising, adapting, overcoming, “living hard,” and doing more with less. During the fiscal austerity of the 1920’s interwar period, the USMC Commandant, Major General John A. Lejeune, challenged the service to innovate and seek opportunity in the uncertainty. The creativity, foresight, and innovation fostered during that period led to a new amphibious doctrine that contributed to the victory in World War II.

Today, the U.S. is entering another interwar period faced with the fiscal realities of a growing national deficit and the recognition that an insatiable focus on multi-billion dollar weapon system programs is unsustainable. While the other services may see the rising priority of “preventing” conflict as a threat to their exotic high-end acquisition programs, the future security environment and the security force assistance (SFA) mission is tailor-made for the USMC. As USMC Brigadier General Daniel O’Donohue recently stated in congressional testimony “it’s in our (USMC) DNA.”⁴ While the security environment of the future may look foreign to some, to the USMC, it resembles what Marine advisors have encountered in every generation in places as close at Haiti and as far away as the jungles of South Vietnam and the deserts of Western Iraq.

Today’s environment of fiscal austerity coupled with the strategic reprioritization of SFA capabilities presents some unique advantages for the USMC. The legacy of battlefield victories, warrior ethos, and austere habits has built unique brand name recognition around the world that generates an inherent demand and competitive advantage for Marine advisors. This brand recognition and the service’s focus on forward-presence, small-unit leadership, and “low-cost small-footprint” habits, uniquely position the service to capitalize on the growing demand for SFA capabilities.⁵ Most importantly, institutionalizing SFA capabilities does not detract from USMC operational readiness but rather, the generating of regionally-focused advisor expertise is a potent combat multiplier that builds critical skills required to navigate the “human terrain” of

future conflicts. Building the capacity of FSF not only helps partner nations provide for their own security but it also builds the trust and interoperability that matters most when crisis strikes.

In 2010, as the demand for advisors exceeded Special Operations Forces (SOF) capabilities, the DoD directed the USMC to develop and maintain “scalable” general purpose force (GPF) capabilities to conduct SFA.⁶ As former Secretary Gates states “advising and mentoring indigenous security forces is moving from the periphery of institutional priorities, where it was considered the province of the Special Forces, to being a key mission for the armed forces as a whole.”⁷ While the USMC has taken action to address these challenges, more must be done. In June 2012, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff J-7 published strategic lessons learned concluding that despite the acknowledgement that “partnering was a key enabler and force multiplier,” across the services “inadequate planning, prioritization, and resourcing of partnering and capacity building slowed progress.”⁸ In other words, despite the strategic imperative to increase SFA capacity and capabilities, there continue to be significant shortfalls.

The USMC has acknowledged the growing importance of the SFA mission in a deluge of vision, strategy, and concept documents. The service has also “experimented” with SFA “enabler” organizations, expanded language training, improved culture education programs, and tested rotational unit structures like the Special Purpose Marine Air to Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF).⁹ The service has also made strides institutionalizing SFA training with the Advisor Training Group (ATG) and the Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group (MCSCG). However, despite the most recent service-level guidance which acknowledges that “combat operations and the training of other nations’ militaries and security forces” will be the “principal focus” of the USMC, the current sourcing and manpower development of advisors remains ad hoc, episodic, and inefficient.¹⁰ The USMC SFA-related efforts to date have not institutionalized the force structure changes required to enable the screening and development of a dedicated

cadre of regionally-oriented advisors that possess the requisite military skills, cultural knowledge, language ability, and advising expertise.

While the USMC must remain focused on the primary mission of serving as the nation's expeditionary crisis response force, it is time for the service to again demonstrate the imagination, innovation, and institutional agility required to reorganize the force and adapt to the enduring importance of advising, training, and equipping foreign security forces (FSF). To meet this strategic imperative the USMC must further professionalize SFA efforts across planning, training, education, and execution. This effort must include standardizing the planning and tracking of SFA as a distinct activity and moving beyond ad hoc, episodic, skills-based SFA efforts to an assessment-based building-block approach focused on building FSF capacity. This effort will require force structure changes that enable the development of a dedicated cadre of screened, trained, and regionally-oriented Marine advisors formed in Marine Advisor Units (MAU) at each of the three Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) commands. These dedicated advisor units will enable the stabilized career development of regional advisor expertise, facilitate MEF force generation, improve SFA capacity building results, and provide regional Marine Forces (MARFOR) commanders with a well-defined and standing scalable Marine advisor capacity. This improved Marine advisor capacity will enable MARFOR commanders to more effectively support the Geographic Combatant Commanders who are faced with the strategic imperative of expanding SFA efforts.

BACKGROUND

Strategic SFA Guidance

The current DoD focus on improving SFA capabilities began with former Secretary of Defense Gates, who had grown frustrated with the military services not embracing the SFA-related organizational changes directed in strategic guidance. In January 2009, Gates requested

that his essay titled “Reprogramming the Pentagon” be published in Foreign Affairs magazine.

In that essay he writes:

Whenever possible, U.S. strategy is to employ indirect approaches – primarily through building the capacity of partner governments and their security forces – to prevent festering problems from turning into crises that require costly and controversial direct military intervention.¹¹

In a stinging indictment, Gates also writes that “apart from the Special Forces community and some dissident Colonels... for decades there has been no strong, deeply rooted constituency inside the Pentagon or elsewhere for institutionalizing the capabilities required” to conduct SFA missions.¹²

In 2010, President Obama highlighted the increased prioritization of SFA in his National Security Strategy (NSS) writing:

We must maintain our military’s conventional superiority, while enhancing its capacity to defeat asymmetric threats. Our military will continue strengthening its capacity to partner with foreign counterparts, train and assist security forces...with a broad range of governments.¹³

This guidance was reflected in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), a congressionally mandated DoD review of strategy, programs, and resources, which recommends the DoD “rebalance the force” in order to be better prepared to “build the security capacity of partner states.”¹⁴ A key recommendation of the QDR is to “strengthen and institutionalize general purpose force capabilities for security force assistance; enhance linguistic, regional, and cultural ability.”¹⁵

In October 2010, following the release of the QDR, Secretary Gates issued a DoD Instruction establishing SFA policy and assigning SFA-related responsibilities across the DoD. The instruction directs each of the military services to “develop and maintain the capability within general purpose forces ...to conduct SFA activities in support of U.S. policy.”¹⁶ Further, each service is directed to “develop, maintain, and institutionalize the capabilities ... to support

DoD efforts to organize, train, equip, and advise foreign military forces” in all security environments to include “politically sensitive environments where an overt presence is unacceptable.”¹⁷ The services are also required to develop “service specific strategy, doctrine, training, education, and proficiency standards for SFA capabilities” and “track individuals who have completed SFA-related training, education, or experience.”¹⁸

The 2012 National Defense Strategy (NDS) reinforces the strategic priority of SFA capabilities. The NDS states that “building partnership capacity elsewhere in the world remains important...whenever possible, we will develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives, relying on exercises, rotational presence, and advisory capabilities.”¹⁹

The current National Military Strategy, which outlines how the military services plan to carry out the NDS, states:

We will strengthen and expand our network of partnerships to enable partner capacity to enhance security. This will help reduce potential safe-havens before violent extremism can take root. We will nest our efforts to build partner capacity with broader national security priorities, consolidate our institutional processes, and improve coordination across agencies. Strengthening international and regional security requires that our forces be globally-available, yet regionally-focused.²⁰

The 2012 Joint Staff Capstone Concept for Joint Operations (CCJO), a comprehensive review led by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on future operational concepts, concludes that “globally integrated operations place a premium on partnering... forces must be able to integrate effectively with U.S. governmental agencies, partner militaries, and indigenous and regional stakeholders...the services must develop deep regional expertise.”²¹

The policy guidance at every level provides clear and unequivocal direction that the future security environment demands that the U.S. military increasingly shift priorities to expanding and professionalizing SFA capabilities focused on building the capacity of partner nation security forces.

USMC SFA Guidance

The growing importance of SFA capabilities has been acknowledged in the planning guidance issued by the last two USMC Commandants. In the 2008 “Commandant’s Vision and Strategy 2025 Implementation Guidance” General James T. Conway states “we will look for opportunities to increase the number of Marines in advisory positions.”²² In the current Commandant’s Planning Guidance, General James F. Amos states that the “demand for military forces with irregular warfare capabilities will expand over the next two decades. This requires Marines who are not only fighters, but also trainers, mentors and advisors - roles requiring unique and highly-desirable skills.” General Amos also states “we will rebalance our Corps, posture it for the future and aggressively experiment with and implement new capabilities and organizations” including fully operationalizing advisor capabilities “to best meet COCOM demands for advising, engaging and partnering.”²³

Despite the clear strategic and service level guidance, there are critics of the USMC efforts to professionalize and increase SFA capacity. The training, organizing, and equipping of Marine advisors competes for scarce resources of equipment and high caliber personnel. The critics contend that SFA is a “boutique” mission that distracts the individual Marine and the service from its core competency of conducting conventional combat. Others critics suggest that building the capacity of foreign security forces is a misguided effort entirely.²⁴ Other critics assert that helping security forces in developing countries should be the work of aid organizations not warfighters. Current USMC Commandant General Amos addresses these critics in a 2012 service-level guidance document writing that “investment in building partner capacity is not charity work...it’s an investment in collective security.”²⁵ The critics must recognize that generating regionally-oriented advisor expertise is as potent combat multiplier that builds critical capabilities that complement and facilitate the USMC core mission of global

expeditionary crisis response. Building FSF capacity not only helps partner nations provide for their own security but it also builds the trust and interoperability that matters most when Marines are called to respond to crisis.

SFA LEXICON

Our strategy goes beyond meeting the challenges of today, and includes preventing the challenges and seizing the opportunities of tomorrow. This requires investing now in the capable partners of the future...These kinds of measures will help us diminish military risk, act before crises and conflicts erupt, and ensure that governments are better able to serve their people.

National Security Strategy, 2010

One of the challenges associated with institutionalizing SFA strategy, doctrine, and education has been the lack of a common lexicon. This confusion has been compounded by the array of SFA-related terms including hybrid warfare, irregular warfare, fourth generation warfare, foreign internal defense, building partner capacity, security cooperation, train-advise-assist, and others. These terms lack standardization and create confusion. The misuse of terminology in SFA-related articles, memorandums, instructions, and planning guidance has complicated the professionalization of SFA as a distinct activity.

A recent U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report identifies the lack of a standardized SFA lexicon as a primary reason that geographic combatant commands had challenges with “planning for and tracking SFA as a distinct activity.”²⁶ The report cites confusion surrounding the “meaning of SFA and its relationship to security cooperation and other related terms.”²⁷ Similar confusion in terminology also resulted in SFA-related USMC planning guidance and force structure decisions that are inherently inefficient.

The most common terminology confusion is caused by the use of the all-encompassing term Security Cooperation (SC) being used to refer to uniquely distinct SFA activities. Recognizing the need to standardize SFA-related definitions, the DoD issued an SFA instruction

in October 2010. The instruction clarifies that SFA is a distinct activity that is differentiated from SC based on whether the activity is intended to build capacity.²⁸ The instruction also clarifies that while SFA and Foreign Internal Defense (FID) are similar activities that build FSF capacity, SFA is differentiated by preparing a FSF for external threats.

Security Force Assistance (SFA). DoD activities that contribute to unified action by the USG to support the development of the *capacity and capability of FSF* and their supporting institutions.

Security Cooperation (SC). Activities undertaken by the DoD to encourage and enable international partners to work with the U.S. *to achieve strategic objectives*.

Foreign Internal Defense (FID). Participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security.

Security Assistance (SA). A group of programs authorized by the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, and the Arms Export Control Act of 1976, as amended, or other related statutes by which the U.S. provides defense articles, military training, and other defense-related services by grant, loan, credit, or cash sales in furtherance or national policies and objectives.

In November 2011, the DoD published the “SFA Lexicon Framework” to further clarify that SFA is a unique and distinct DoD activity. The document clarifies that commonly used SFA-related terms SC, SA, SFA, and FID, “are relational; not hierarchical.”²⁹ In other words, nesting SFA and SA under SC is not an accurate depiction since “capabilities apply across all types of operations and missions.”³⁰ For example, an SA program such as Foreign Military Sales (FMS) is considered an SC activity, but it could also be part of an SFA activity that is directly building FSF capacity.

The 2012 *Joint SFA Planner’s Handbook* clarifies that the purpose of SFA activities, which distinguishes them from other SC activities, is to “create, maintain, or enhance a sustainable capability or capacity.”³¹ The handbook also clarifies that “building partner

capacity” is a non-doctrinal term that should be “treated as an outcome of SFA rather than an activity.”³²

To better nest the USMC SFA-related efforts under the DoD strategic initiatives the USMC must standardize its lexicon. The USMC should prominently focus on the use of the term SFA, rather than SC, as it more accurately describes the preponderance of capacity building activities conducted by the service. Within the USMC, any use of the term SC should be closely scrutinized as it relates to broader strategic efforts to gain access, influence, or diplomatic action, none of which are a primary focus of the service. While there are limited occasions where the term SC may apply, the service lexicon should highlight SFA as a primary focus of the service efforts. The USMC should review all service doctrine, policies, materials, and organizational naming conventions to ensure that SFA is prominently identified.

Another SFA-related term that the USMC must standardize and prominently reflect in its service lexicon is the term “advisor.” Throughout history there have been a number of terms used to describe Marines involved in SFA activities including: advisor, trainer, coach, mentor, transition team member, SC-team member, embedded transition team, etc. These terms reflect a hesitation by some to use the term “advisor” out of concern that the term may invoke negative connotations of the Vietnam conflict. In reality, the Marine advisor effort in Vietnam is considered one of the most successful components of the conflict. The term Marine “advisor” is used with distinction in books and historical accounts of Vietnam.³³

The *Joint SFA Planners Handbook*, defines the term advisor as “anyone directly participating in any SFA mission” which includes the five categories of “organize, train, equip, rebuild/build, and advise.”³⁴ The Marine Corps Reference Publication (MCRP) 3-33.8A defines advisor as “an individual or team tasked to teach, coach, and advise FSF in order to develop their professional skills.” The USMC should immediately review all SFA-related doctrine, policies,

materials, skills designators, and organizational naming conventions to ensure that the use of the terms “advisor” and “advisor team” are standardized across the service.

U.S. MARINE ADVISOR ADVANTAGE

Article IV: Marines build strong partners. The USMC has long been a security partner of choice. Sized more closely to the security forces of most other nations, the USMC provides a model of a tightly-integrated air-ground-logistics force, suitable to train effective security institutions.

General Amos, Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps
True North: Marines in Defense of the Nation, 2012

Evolution of Marine Advisors

Long before the term SFA was coined, Marines of every generation served in advisor type roles. In a recent service-level document, USMC Lieutenant General Richard Tryon writes that “although the current emphasis on security cooperation has new strategic rationale, many generations of Marines have been engaged with international partners, both in times of stability and war.”³⁵ As early as 1804, USMC Lieutenant Presley O’Bannon led a small group of native fighters to seize the fortress of Tripoli in Derna which contributed to the U.S victory over the Barbary Pirates. In the early 1900’s, U.S. Marines served as advisors training FSFs throughout Central America during the “Banana Wars.” Recognizing the importance of the lessons acquired during this thirty year period the USMC published the “Small Wars Manual” in 1940. The manual is still a primary reference and training document for the U.S. military.

During the period after World War II, Marine advisors were deployed to China, Korea, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. During the Vietnam War, Marine advisors developed innovative Combined Action Platoons (CAP) that assigned Marine advisors to live among the local populace while building the capacity of local security forces. More recently, Marines were called upon to serve as advisors in the deserts of Western Iraq and Afghanistan. For over ten years, thousands of Marine advisors were trained to live with, advise, train and assist the Iraqi and Afghan security forces. Over the past decade, Marine advisors have also

been engaged in significant SFA missions building the capacity of FSF in Republic of Georgia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Colombia, Uganda, Burundi, and Liberia.³⁶

Unfortunately, despite the valiant efforts of individual Marine advisors, the institutional support to SFA missions has often fallen short. Throughout history, after-actions and reports to Congress have told the story of systemic inefficiencies and recurring lessons learned. For example, upon reading the reports coming from Marine advisors in Iraq, retired USMC General Anthony Zinni stated “we forgot all those lessons after the war” referring to his 1967 tour as a Marine advisor in Vietnam.³⁷

Marine advisors returning from Vietnam reported a “lack of coherent and integrated strategy for training, deploying, and supporting” the Marine advisors.³⁸ Approximately fifty years later, the Deputy Director for the Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance, Colonel Sean Ryan, stated “what you had was a lot of people over there (Iraq) alone and unafraid making things happen or failing to make things happen based on their own personalities and initiative.”³⁹ In recognition of the shortcomings with the advisor efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan the former Secretary of Defense Gates quipped that the U.S. military was still operating with a structure from another era “designed to defeat other armies, navies, and air forces, not to advise, train, and equip them.”⁴⁰ The fact remains that the hard lessons learned by each generation of Marine advisors have never been institutionalized with the necessary force structure changes required to establish a professionalized advisory capacity.

Competitive Advantage: USMC “Brand”

The evolving international security environment dictates that the demand for regionally-oriented expert advisors with the small-unit military skills and the ability to operate with low-cost, small foot-print approaches will continue to grow. As the global demand for SFA increasingly shifts to semi-permissive environments in support of FSFs that require basic

military skills such as small-unit leadership, maintenance, logistics, and intelligence, the SFA mission will continue to shift from the province of SOF to the broader general purpose force. While each of the services has struggled to professionalize the required SFA capabilities, the USMC is uniquely positioned to become the SFA provider of choice. The USMC competitive advantage is based on three factors: decentralized small-unit expertise, global brand name recognition, and an institutional bias for frugality.

While the USMC trains to specific technical standards, the force is built around a common ethos that “every Marine is a rifleman.” This leadership development concept is more than words, it is a battle-hardened philosophy built around a decentralized style of command that relies on initiative, acceptance of responsibility, and mutual trust at every level. The majority of countries around the world that require SFA-related services retain small multi-purpose militaries that are representative of the Marine Air to Ground Task Force (MAGTF) concept that the USMC is built around. Therefore the USMC small-unit focus provides prospective advisors with the baseline military skills most often needed by partner countries’ security forces, many of which operate in the contested littorals, an area of USMC expertise.

Another advantage the USMC has over the other services in providing SFA capabilities is the legacy of USMC battlefield victories and warrior ethos that has built unique global brand name recognition. As USMC Lieutenant General Richard Tryon writes “our (USMC) relatively small size and warrior ethos has made us an attractive partner on the global stage.”⁴¹ Foreign militaries around the world view the USMC as their partner of choice to train their security forces which are often smaller GPF forces that are more representative of the USMC than the Army.⁴² This preference was evident when Republic of Georgia President Mikheil Saakashvili specifically requested that training be conducted by Marine advisors when he made the offer to send troops to support the effort in Afghanistan. The “Georgians recognized the professionalism

of the Marine Corps from prior training programs and operations, and frankly, they wanted to work with the best.”⁴³

Another competitive advantage the USMC has in meeting the growing SFA demand is the service culture of frugality. This legacy of frugality has been a central component of USMC philosophy since the inception of the service. In the book *First to Fight*, USMC Lieutenant General Victor Krulak writes an entire chapter titled “The Penny Pinchers” on the legendary reputation of frugality earned by Marines of every generation. Krulak writes that “frugality was, in short, the Corps’ way of life.”⁴⁴ As the NDS states, the “low-cost and small-footprint approach” to advising FSF will be the priority of the DoD moving forward. The USMC is best positioned to execute that intent.

The small-unit expertise, global brand name recognition, and institutional bias for frugality uniquely position the USMC to meet the growing demand for SFA. The USMC should capitalize on these competitive advantages and build dedicated advisor units to leverage the service’s status as the partner of choice for SFA missions. These competitive advantages in meeting the strategic imperative of professionalized SFA capabilities will be critical as the service equities are challenged in the anticipated DoD-wide budget cuts.

BUILDING USMC SFA CAPACITY

While the USMC has a legacy of successfully advising FSF, historically there have been a series of recurring lessons learned including ad hoc selection of advisors; low priority for the advisor mission; inadequate curriculum and teaching aids for training FSF; and insufficient training on advisory skills, language, and culture.⁴⁵ While the USMC has experimented with small SFA “enabling” organizations the service has resisted the force structure changes required to develop dedicated Marine advisors. This recurring shortfall is reflected in a 2007

congressional oversight investigation which concludes that despite DoD acknowledgement that “developing indigenous security forces” is a “core U.S. military mission” the military “services lack sufficient standing military advisory capability to meet current, and potential future, requirements for this mission.”⁴⁶

Over the years there have been two schools of thought on developing a dedicated cadre of Marine advisors. The first assumes that there is nothing inherently unique about advising a FSF and therefore the SFA mission is simply another mission essential task for an infantry battalion or a randomly selected individual augment. The competing school of thought is that SFA is a distinct activity that in order to be optimally effective requires a selection process to identify Marines with the aptitude to advise, training on unique advisor skills, regional and cultural education, and MOS proficiency. Within the USMC, the institutional outcome of these two competing schools of thought has been a focus on creating a hybrid solution built around the idea that any Marine can be an advisor if prepared by an SFA “enabling” organization. To date, the service has viewed SFA as an episodic collateral duty to be filled by a rotation of “individual augments” that are prepared for short-duration missions and then returned to their unit, often never serving as an advisor again. While this approach provides a minimalist solution it lacks consistency, creates enormous expense from turnover of personnel, and fails to build service-level capacity or expertise.

The modern evolution of the USMC SFA “enabling” organizations began in 2004 in response to the burgeoning demand for Marine advisors in Iraq. At the time the service had no standing expertise or capacity to prepare advisors for SFA missions, despite the recommendations of every generation of Marine advisors. In order to satisfy the requirement, USMC tasked the Security Cooperation Education and Training Center (SCETC) to develop SFA pre-deployment training and to manage Security Assistance (SA) activities for the service.⁴⁷

In order to meet the demand for Marine advisors in Iraq each MEF established Advisor Training Cells (ATC) to deal with the processing of individual augments and to provide basic classroom-based advisor training. In January 2006, the USMC Training and Education Command established the Advisor Training Group (ATG) to establish a more advanced practical application and mission rehearsal exercise training for advisors. While the poorly resourced ATC's and ATG struggled to provide adequate training to meet the growing demand for advisors, the service as a whole struggled with systemic advisor sourcing inefficiencies. With no unit structure for dedicated advisors, the USMC force generation sourcing methodology remained, as it did during Vietnam, an informal, highly inefficient, ad hoc process between Headquarters USMC, service components, and the operating forces. Instead of the service speaking with one authoritative voice for generating Marine advisors, "multiple commands split responsibility for organizing, training, and equipping advisor teams without the benefit of an institutional continuum" built on the experience and lessons learned of Marine advisors.⁴⁸ The sourcing process was also blatantly lacking in providing any mechanism for selecting the right person for the right job. A key lesson learned from advisors of every generation is that not all good Marines are good advisors; the selection of the right person for the job is the most critical first step to success.

While the demand for advisors in Iraq and Afghanistan continued to grow the USMC was also under pressure to develop SFA capacity required for the planning, coordination, funding, and force generation for SFA missions elsewhere around the world. At the time, the ATG was overwhelmed with a singular focus on pre-deployment training. The requirement to expand SFA capacity beyond Iraq and Afghanistan was further complicated when the recently established Foreign Military Training Unit (FMTU), a unit built to develop and deploy Marine advisors, was transferred to the fledgling Marine Special Operations Advisor Group. Rather than resource

SCETC or ATG with additional force structure the service elected to create another new command, the Marine Corps Training and Advisory Group (MCTAG) to meet the meet the requirement for expanded global SFA capacity.

In 2007, the CMC directed the establishment of MCTAG. The unit was designed to serve as the incubator of institutional SFA capacity with force structure allocated to developing dedicated Marine advisors assigned to the unit for three year tours. The MCTAG mission and force structure of 747 was approved and programmed into the plan to build the USMC to 202,000. Unfortunately, as was the case following the efforts to build advising capacity after Vietnam, in 2009 the USMC made the decision to not fully resource MCTAG. This decision nullified the original intent of the organization by eliminating all of the dedicated advisor billets leaving only the headquarters element of 182. The task organization of the remaining headquarters had originally been designed to command, control, and enable an organization of 747 Marine advisors, not to serve as a stand-alone unit.

In 2011, the remaining MCTAG headquarters element was merged with SCETC to form the Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group (MCSCG) with an authorized end strength of 220. The MCSCG is currently organized into a headquarters section; six regionally aligned Coordination, Liaison, and Assessment Teams (CLAT); Security Assistance Branch; and Training and Instructor Group (TIG). The current MCSCG structure is built to provide SFA training, education, planning, and coordination to assist the MARFORs with enabling teams of individual augment Marines assigned as advisors. The unit structure today does not provide for any dedicated advisor capacity.

Throughout the evolution of USMC SFA efforts the service has lacked a holistic approach to resourcing SFA with a standing scalable advisor unit structure. Rather than focus on the development of long-term institutional SFA capacity the service has pursued ad hoc short-

term solutions that quickly revert to the status quo force structure. The SFA mission should no longer be viewed as an exotic specialty mission for service, it should be acknowledged as a core competency of the USMC and reflected in force structure prioritization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

By increasing SFA activities and capabilities, we may be able to preclude or minimize conflict, or increase our own security, by providing weak or failing states with the tools, capabilities, and knowledge to protect themselves.⁴⁹

General James Mattis
HASC Testimony, 2009

Marine Advisor Units (MAUs)

While the USMC has attempted twice with FMTU and MCTAG to create force structure that facilitates the development of a cadre of regionally-focused advisors, but the service has not yet made the concept a reality. The result has been the acceptance of risk associated with ad hoc sourcing solutions. This has created an inefficient system that rotates individual augments or unit sourced solutions through a revolving door of ad hoc training and short duration missions. This inefficient process has impacted operational readiness of units affected by individual augment requirements, elevated SFA training costs, and reduced the consistency and effectiveness of USMC SFA efforts.

To resolve this issue, the service should form 150-man MAUs at each of the three MEFs. Each MAU should be commanded by a board slated Lieutenant Colonel and staffed according to the regional priority of the corresponding MEF (see appendix for proposed construct). The flexibility of the small team structure will enable the service to educate and train a standing regional-oriented advisor capacity that can service the majority of the small-footprint SFA missions while providing a scalable SFA leadership framework that can be quickly expanded with augments to provide surge capacity in support a larger-scale capacity-building missions.

While the staffing for the MAU structure can be offset using the efficiencies gained in the merger of all SFA enabling organizations (CAOCL, ATG, MCSCG) the main body of Marines must come from the hard decisions associated with the realization that SFA is a core mission that requires unique and highly desirable advisor skills. The skills Marines obtain during a three year MAU tour will benefit all occupational fields and the broader service as Marines rotate back to the fleet forces or supporting establishment.

The regional MAUs will not only provide a stabilized cadre of dedicated regionally-focused Marine advisors the units will also provide an opportunity to expand and operationalize current USMC programs that build regional expertise such as the new enlisted Foreign Area Specialist (FAS) program and the FAO, RAO, and RCLF programs. The MAUs will also serve as the conduit to maintain advisor selection standards. As a comprehensive Vietnam era study indicates “finding the officers and men capable of becoming outstanding advisors is the single most important step in improving advisor-counterpart relationships.”⁵⁰ The MAU construct will address the longstanding service shortfall of not have a screening, assessment, and selection process in place that identifies Marines with the drive, patience, personality, aptitude, rapport, credibility, and tactical proficiency required to effectively serve as an advisor. The MAUs will also provide continuity of support personnel that can address other well documented SFA-related shortfalls such as coordination associated with country clearances, passports, travel VISAs, and other unique travel claim considerations not familiar to most administration sections.

The MAUs also address the reality that military capabilities, like advising, are never truly institutionalized until the service culture traits and reward structure signal their importance. The signals of what are important to the service are “sent by what gets funded, who gets promoted, what is taught in the academies and staff colleges, and how personnel are trained.”⁵¹ By making

the force structure changes to develop MAUs the USMC validates the importance of the SFA mission and sends a clear signal that will impact the overall service culture.

The service culture must also be managed to ensure that Marines selected to serve as advisors are competitive for promotion and command selection. This career progression can be influenced by providing equivalent leadership billets, screening, and board precepts. The MAUs will provide unit level leadership billets at multiple levels from team leader to Lieutenant Colonel level command. Like other mid-career supporting establishment tours, such as recruiting or drill field, a competitive board selection process would ensure that Marines selected for a three-year MAU billet are screened for career timing, a track record of high performance, and military occupational specialty (MOS) credibility prior to assignment. Advisor career progression can be further reinforced with precepts providing CMC guidance to all promotion and command boards. While the goal of every board is to select the “best and most fully qualified,” the CMC directed SFA precepts would identify FSF advising as a critical skill set that qualifies Marines to support a priority mission for the service. Over time, the force structure changes, board precepts, and advisor screening process will be reflected in service culture changes that reflect the growing importance of SFA.

Consolidate SFA Enabler Organizations: Create Marine Corps Advisor Group

In order to fully institutionalize the long-term SFA capacity the USMC must codify efforts to establish one entity as the authority on SFA training and readiness standards. To address this requirement and dramatically improve force structure efficiencies it is recommended that CAOCL and ATG be merged with MCSCG and renamed the Marine Corps Advisor Group (MCAG). The MCAG would serve as the “center of excellence” for training and tracking SFA skills within the USMC in accordance with TECOM approved standards. The MCAG would also be the service proponent for all SFA training and readiness issues representing Headquarters

Marine Corps (HQMC) equities at joint SFA conferences and serving as the service interface for all SFA-related cross-service and interagency coordination.

The MCAG training standards should be built to train and track three modular SFA training tiers using the recently approved USMC advising training and readiness standards. The three training tiers of SFA skill identifiers should be built in accordance with the three conditions outlined in DoDI 5000.68 that include permissive, semi-permissive, and non-permissive SFA environments.

The MCAG should also serve as the USMC “center of excellence” for developing and maintaining standardized curriculum and teaching aids designed to train FSFs on the full spectrum of war fighting skills from weapons handling to company-level operations to battalion-level staff integration. This curriculum and associated teaching aids should be developed by MCAG personnel in conjunction with USMC schools taking into account foreign weapons considerations and foreign disclosure requirements.

The MCAG should also serve as the SFA Information Manager responsible for organizing and maintaining an easily accessible repository of all SFA-related materials including: advisor training curriculum, FSF training curriculum and teaching aids cleared for foreign disclosure, FSF assessments, and SFA after-actions. In addition, the MCAG should develop and maintain standardized tools and templates for MARFOR staff use in assessment-based SFA planning and milestone tracking.

Institutional Focus: “Crisis Response” and “Advisor”

While most Marine leaders are intimately familiar with the immutable laws of war so eloquently captured by Carl von Clausewitz, during periods of major defense drawdowns it is critical that leadership also consider the immutable laws of marketing. When the congressional fiscal cutting knives are drawn the “send in the Marines” legacy will be met with a clinical

assessment of what unique capabilities and efficiencies the service truly offers. While this concern is not new, it is very real.

Throughout history the USMC has been adept at marketing its uniqueness to the American people. The Marine leadership of today must continue this legacy and consider the law of focus outlined in a best-selling business book titled *The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing*. In this book the authors suggests that in order to succeed long-term, organizations must develop simple ideas that are expressed in simple words that build a perception of specific uniqueness in the minds of others. It is a method of “burning” organizational uniqueness into the mind of others by narrowing the focus of an organization to a few simple words. Examples of organizations that have done this successfully are Federal Express and Microsoft who built uniqueness with terms like overnight and spreadsheet.⁵²

While the USMC has a legacy of effective marketing, in times of defense drawdowns it is critical that the organization stay focused on simple unique capabilities. Most organizations do not need more ideas, they need fewer with a “simple focus that may not seem creative, in and of itself, but in the world outside turns out to be very powerful.”⁵³ The two simple concepts that the USMC should focus on owning in the minds of the Congress and the American people are “crisis response” and “military advisor.” While these concepts are not a strategy they are a tool to focus the service internally while focusing the external marketing message for the future. By focusing the institution and owning the phrase “military advisor” in the minds of those outside the organization, the USMC will be better positioned to develop a leading position in the high-growth area of SFA.

CONCLUSION

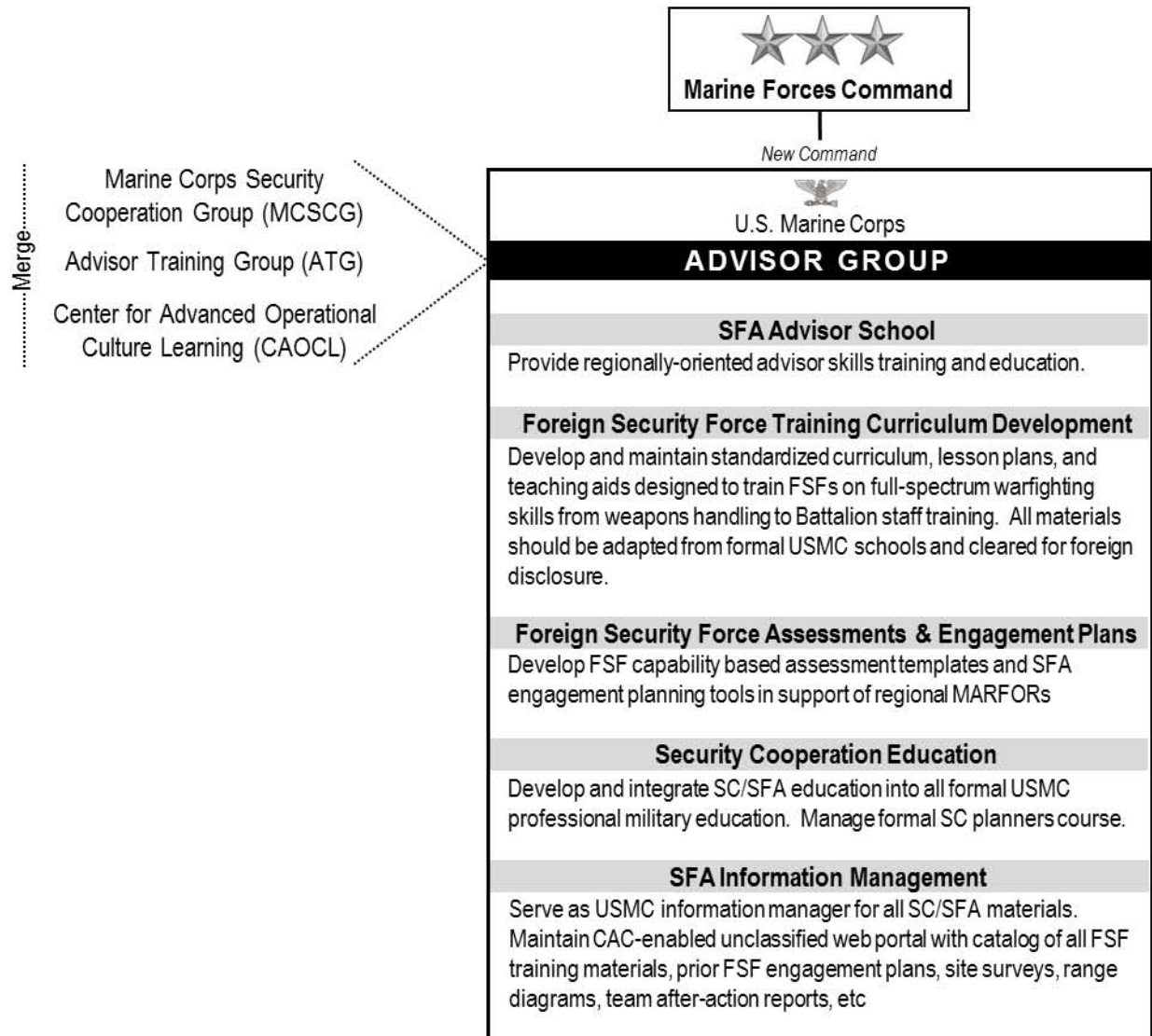
Over the coming years the defense budgets will continue to decline and the future security environment will be increasingly characterized by instability, poverty, extremism, failed

states, and violent non-state actors. While the USMC will remain a multi-purpose force, the future security environment demands that the service shift priorities to shaping, training, deterring, and preventing what Rudyard Kipling calls “the savage wars of peace.”⁵⁴ Of all the military services the USMC is best positioned to meet this national security requirement due to the service’s institutional focus on small-unit leadership, small-unit tactics, and decentralized command. This will require that the USMC professionalize indirect approaches focused on building the capacity of partner nation security forces.

To fully leverage the USMC advantage in advising FSFs will require institutionalizing the long-term capacity to train, educate, equip, and professionalize a dedicated cadre of regionally-oriented Marine advisors formed in Marine Advisor Units (MAU). This scalable advisor capacity will serve as a force multiplier providing professionalized SFA capabilities. The MAUs will enable improvements in standardizing the planning and tracking of SFA as a distinct activity allowing the service to move beyond ad hoc, episodic, skills-based training to a more targeted approach of assessment-based, building block capacity building. These dedicated advisor units will also enable the stabilized career development of regional advisor expertise, facilitate MEF force generation, improve SFA capacity building results, and provide regional Marine Forces (MARFOR) commanders with a well-defined and standing Marine advisor capacity. Ultimately this improved Marine advisor capacity will enable MARFOR commanders to more effectively support the strategic imperative faced by Geographic Combatant Commanders to expand SFA efforts worldwide.

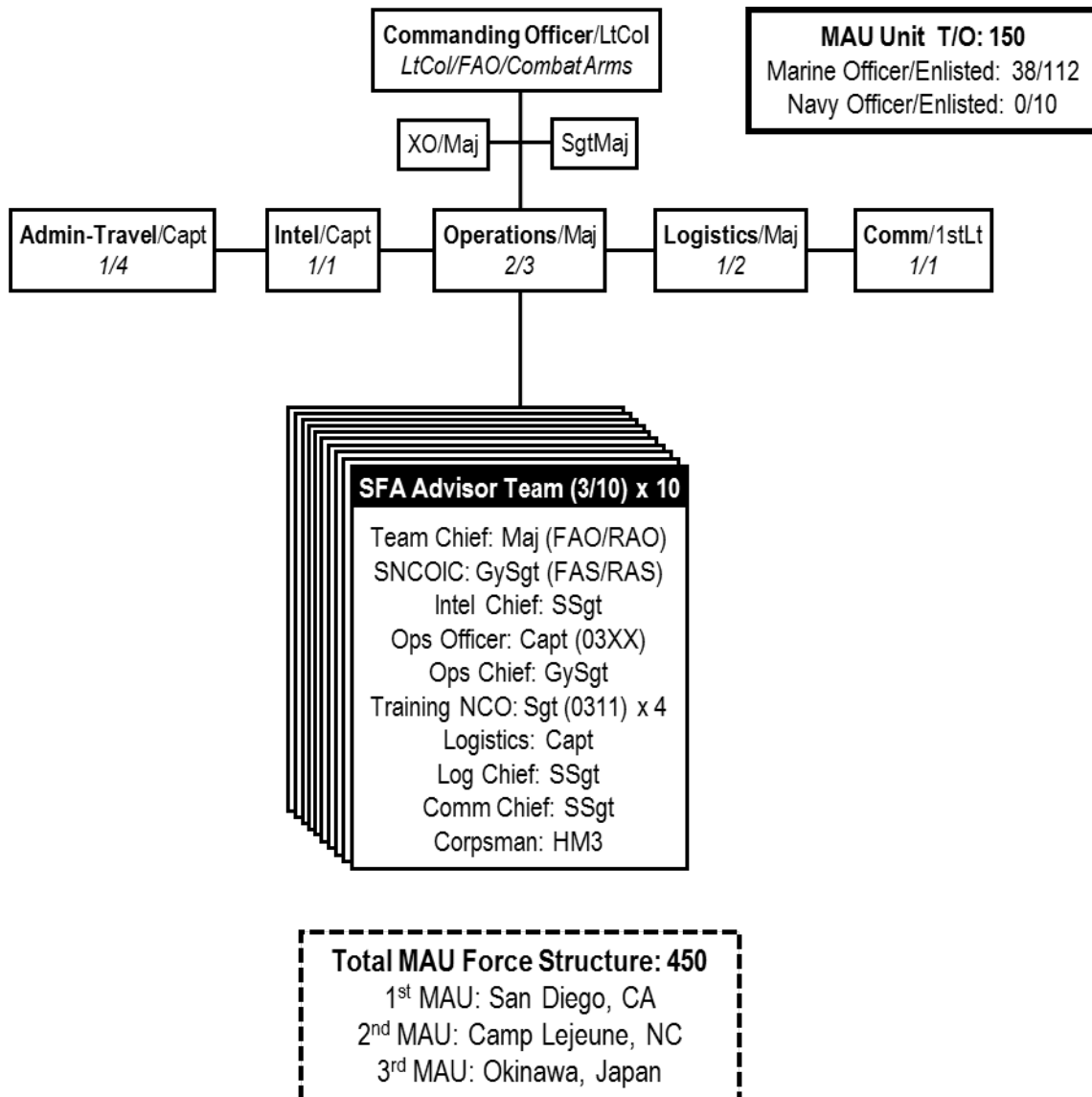
APPENDIX

Proposed USMC Force Structure Changes



APPENDIX

Proposed Marine Advisor Unit (MAU) Organizational Construct



APPENDIX

Current USMC Security Cooperation Enabling Organizations

Advisor Training Group (ATG), Marine Corps Air-Ground Task Force Training Command (MAGTFTC), 29 Palms, CA

ATG trains Marine Corps advisor teams to advise, mentor, and train foreign military, police, and border units in operational techniques and procedures to combat terrorism and counter insurgency.

Center for Advanced Operational and Culture Learning (CAOCL) Quantico, VA

CAOCL ensures the Marine Corps is a force that is globally prepared, regionally focused, and effective at navigating and influencing the culturally complex 21st century operating environments in support of Marine Corps missions and requirements. The organization provides units performing security cooperation missions with culture and language familiarization training specifically tailored to a mission and the cultures, countries, and regions in which the supported unit will operate.

Center for Irregular Warfare Integration Division (CIWID) Quantico, VA

CIWID is the central Marine Corps organization for identifying, coordinating, and implementing irregular warfare and security cooperation capability development initiatives across all elements of the DOTMLPF spectrum.

Marine Corps Systems Command – International Programs (MCSC-IP) Quantico, VA

MCSC-IP implements the sale, lease, and transfer of all Marine Corps defense articles and associated support to foreign partners, and executes international comparative technology programs.

Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group (MCSCG) Virginia Beach, VA

MCSCG was formed to support Marine Corps worldwide security cooperation efforts. The group coordinates, manages, executes, and evaluates security cooperation programs and activities to include assessments, planning, security cooperation-related education and training, and advisory support. The organization's aim is to ensure unity of effort in building partner nation security force capacity in order to facilitate Marine Corps support to GCC objectives.

APPENDIX

Current Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group (MCSCG) Tasks

1. In coordination with TECOM, plan, coordinate, manage, and execute USMC Security Cooperation training and education, including:
 - Implement Security Cooperation education into the formal Professional Military Education continuum,
 - Manage USMC DISAM quotas,
 - Conduct advisor training, and
 - Adjudicate USMC SC training standards via the NAVMC 3500.59A, *Security Cooperation Training and Readiness Manual*.
2. Conduct Foreign Security Force – Capability Based Assessments (FSF-CBA) and develop Security Cooperation Engagement Plans (SCEP) in support of Combatant Command and MARFOR objectives.
3. Conduct Security Cooperation engagements and activities in support of validated Global Force Management and Foreign Military Sales (FMS)/Foreign Military Financing Program (FMFP) requirements.
4. Provide deployable Security Cooperation planning and execution support to the Regional MARFORs and MAGTFs.
5. In support of MARFORs, provide in-country coordination and liaison support for Security Cooperation events.
6. In coordination with TECOM, plan, coordinate, manage, and execute Security Assistance education and training programs; including:
 - Field Studies Program,
 - International Military Education and Training (IMET),
 - Foreign Military Sales (FMS)/Foreign Military Financing Program (FMFP), and
 - International Military Student School quota management.
 - Marine Corps Security Cooperation Education and Training Desktop Guide
7. In coordination with DC, PP&O, support the development and review of service, joint, and intergovernmental Security Cooperation-related doctrine, policies, authorities, and initiatives.
8. Maintain an SC information repository; including,
 - Foreign Security Force – Capability Based Assessments,
 - Security Cooperation Engagement Plans,
 - Lesson Plans,
 - Planning Tools,
 - Security Cooperation Best Practices,
 - Trip Reports, and
 - References.

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